



## Employee's Perception of the Public Relations Practice in Health Institutions in Imo State: A Case Study of Federal Medical Centre, Owerri, Nigeria.

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### ABSTRACT

The study is on the employee's perception of the public relations practice in health institutions in Imo State: A study of Federal Medical Centre Owerri. The specific objectives of the study included to: find out the public relations practice adopted by FMC, Owerri in her service delivery; ascertain the extent to which FMC, Owerri embrace their adopted public relations strategies in improving her service delivery; find out how employees of the health institutions perceive their public relations strategies; and examine the challenges facing effective utilisation of public relations strategies in FMC, Owerri. The study was anchored on transfer process model. The survey research method was adopted for this study. The population of the study consisted of doctors, nurses, and health officials in FMC Owerri with a total population of 4,802. The Australian online calculator was used in the determination of a sample size of 371. In this study, multi-state sampling technique was employed. Questionnaire was used to elicit data from the respondents. The measuring instrument was validated by the supervisor and the correlation coefficient of .913 was obtained. Data obtained were analyzed using mean score value. Findings revealed that FMC Owerri adopted public relations strategies in their service delivery at an average mean score of 3.36; the extent to which FMC embraced public relations strategies in improving their service delivery is to a great extent with mean score of 2.81; The FMC Owerri had a positive perception among their employees at an average mean score of 2.92. Also, it was found that incessant strike, corruption, unqualified public relations executive, inadequate staff, lack of staff incentives and work overload were the challenges facing effective utilisation of public relations strategies in FMC Owerri (Average weighted mean = 3.17). The researcher concluded that FMC Owerri employed public relations strategies in their service delivery. The researcher, therefore, recommended that Government and other health stakeholders should endeavour to improve on the staff welfare and conditions of service as this will inspire them to put in their best.

**Keywords:** Perception, Public Relations, Health, Employees, Strategies.

### 1. Introduction

Public relations is a vital aspect of any enterprise and when it comes to health services, the role of public relations becomes more crucial as these services are related to life, death and recovery of people (Rathore, Mathur & Jain, 2019). Public relations in healthcare entails communication of the health institutions with their external and internal publics. Public relations in healthcare sector had been adopted by many healthcare institutions, both public and private, and this is an indication that it plays an important role in healthcare. With the present high cost of medical care, challenges in delivering high quality healthcare, as well as the need for efficient management of resources and healthcare facilities, emphasis has been placed on the need for public relations. In the hospital, public relations is important and can play a vital role in the hospital attractiveness and reputation. The healthcare sector is changing, and this has been witnessed in the public relations department too (Alteneji, 2021). Hospitals require public relations activities to distinguish them from competitors, provide two-way communication between the society and the hospital, and assist to create a strong hospital image and culture (Gohil & Gohil, 2016). This is because the health care industry is perceived as more important given the fact that health care is of prime importance for the people and is associated with their life. Effective communication is germane for successful public relations. As for the public relations, Gecikli (2014) says it is a series of continuing activities evaluating the attitudes of the target community, developing relations based on mutual cooperation and

acceptance, aiming at gaining the respect, affection and sympathy of the target people and establishing a positive image, and thus it is a sine qua non for every corporation.

The existence of the public relations division or department has a very important and crucial role because it becomes a bridge between the institution and the public. The Public Relations Department plays a vital role in crisis management, building public trust, and maintaining the reputation or image of an organization or company. In addition, the public relations department can also be a measure of whether a company is progressing or not (Aulia, 2020). The Public Relations Department is responsible for implementation of hospital marketing programs, advertising, communication, patient satisfaction and monitoring. Not only does it help the hospital organization achieve its socio-economic goals but also help in patients' well-being/speedy recovery (Gohil & Gohil 2016). The reputation, image and outlook towards a hospital as a service provider depend mainly by the initiatives and attitude of all personnel working in the hospital including doctors, management staff, etc. A hospital is often judged by the standard of efficiency or courtesy offered by these departments. Importantly it should be kept in mind that these have cultural and social undertones (Gohil et al., 2016). The image of doctors and health institutions in the public is not even close to what health professionals want. Various health institutions are shaken by the affairs associated with unethical practices, charging of high fees, corruption and bribery. People even think that Doctors are stereotype people, having pride and arrogance and do not like to talk with patients and do not possess good communication skills etc. For eliminating such dilemmas and improving the image of doctors and health institutions, management of health care organization recruits communication professionals. These professionals are called PROs or Public Relations Officers. The job of such professionals is to portray the image and efficiency of the institutions and doctors in such a manner to the people so that it will be perceived as the best place for treatment (Rathore, Mathur & Jain, 2019).

Public relations practice has been found to be an effective health care delivery tool and this is because it is likely to influence healthcare delivery in three dimensions. First, it will likely influence the choice of health institutions by patients, second, it will likely influence indices of healthcare management performance, and third, it will influence public attitude to healthcare services. This assumption concerning the tripod importance of public relations in health care delivery is supported by evidence in the literature. For example, Tengilimoglu, Yesiltas, Kisa, and Dziegielewski (2008) revealed that public relations activities were a crucial factor in determining consumer hospital choice. This is because the behaviour and attitude of personnel as public relations activities that support the hospital's reputation within the public are key in hospital choice. Kehinde and Chukwuemeka (2018) concluded that there is a positive relationship between good public relations and management performance. Therefore, it becomes necessary for a study of this nature to conduct an assessment of the public relations practices of Federal Medical Centre Owerri to find out if they adopt public relations practices in her service delivery and to what extent.

### ***1.2 Objectives of the study:***

Generally, the objectives of the study is to

- I. Find out the public relations practice adopted by FMC, Owerri in their service delivery.
- II. Ascertain the extent to which FMC, Owerri embrace their adopted public relations practice in improving her service delivery.
- III. Find out how employees of FMC, Owerri perceive their public relations practice.
- IV. Examine the challenges facing effective utilisation of public relations practice in FMC, Owerri.

### ***1.3 Research Questions:***

The following research questions are formulated to guide the research.

1. What are the public relations practice adopted by FMC, Owerri in her service delivery?
2. To what extent has FMC, Owerri embraced public relations practice in improving her service delivery?
3. How do employees of FMC, Owerri perceive the public relations practice in their institution?
4. What are the challenges facing effective utilisation of public relations practice in FMC, Owerri?

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## **2. Conceptual Framework**

### ***2.1 Concept of Public Relations***

The term "public relations" has so many definitions as given by many scholars, researchers and communication experts. This is because it cuts across all disciplines and each person tries to define it from his own perspective. Norman (2002), views public relations as that of establishing and maintaining mutual understanding between an organization and its publics for the purpose of communicating a company's views and objectives while at the same time correcting public reactions. This is further supported by Jefkins (2003) who defines public relations as consisting of all forms of planned communications between an organization and its publics for the purpose of achieving specific objectives.

Nwosu (2011), offers a number of definitions of public relations to include winning friends, keeping them and influencing them as well as others. From all these definitions given above, one thing that is clear that public relations is about creating and maintaining goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. Thus, it is a management function which helps to establish and maintain mutual lines of communication understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organization and its publics. Besides, it involves the management of problems and issues which might be relevant to any sector (Ugbaja, 2014). Nwosu (2011), expresses that one major function of public relations is the management of all forms of corporate information and communications for any organization. This function includes all types of internal communication and external communications between an organization and its external publics. Internally, the public relations manager will handle regularly such functions as

employee communications and organization communication including grapevine and other informal communication forms. Ugbaja (2014) states that the external communication forms which the public relations strategy must handle include publicity and publicity campaigns which must be well planned and executed. This is very vital because in this age of information technology (IT), the corporate information and communication management has special functions and importance. Ukonu et al., (2017) say that public relations is a critical tool for behaviour change. Uduji (2013) says that Public relations could be an effective tool for behaviour change communication.

This is because public relations tools could be essential mechanisms through which opinion could be shaped. Seitel (2007) says that the aim of public relations is to inform the public, prospective customers, investors, partners, employees, and other stakeholders and ultimately persuade them to maintain a certain view about the organization, its leadership, products, or of political decisions. Scholars (e.g., Cureteanu & Maxim, 2007; Shamsan & Otieno, 2015) reported that public relations is a critical tool for opinion moulding, attitude change and perceptions about an organization as well as defining the nature of the relationship between an organization and its public. Suffice it to say that public relations could be effective at behaviour modification; it follows logically that public relations tools could be useful for health campaigns, especially concerning reproductive health.

### **2.1.2 Public Relations Practices**

According to Chukwu (2015), the task of building good public relations can only be achieved with the use of appropriate tools. These are publicity, public relations advertising and special events. In this study only publicity and special events were discussed. Publicity is the tool of mass communication which can be defined as the generation of news about a person, product or service that appears in broadcast or print media (Doug and Hanson, 2003). Again, Nwokoye (2004), define publicity as information about an organization and its products that is conveyed to the public by the mass media because such information is news worthy. Publicity is always given in the form of editorials, news release or news in print and electronic media. Accordingly, opportunities for publicity include the introduction of a new product, award ceremony, company sales and carings, etc. The different types of publicity include news release, service feature articles, product publicity, financial publicity, photography and printed materials (Chukwu, 2004).

Courtesy call is to create good rapport between an organization and its relevant publics. According to Ugbaja (2014), when such visit is made, the organization uses the support, cooperation and understanding of the organization. Talk show/media link is usually an interactive session between representatives of the organization and the general public either on TV or radio. The objective is to win the sympathy, understanding, goodwill and support of not only its publics but also the general public. Sponsorship according to Ukpaukure (2002), sponsorship is the provision of financial and material resources by a named organization for the promotion or execution of a program from which the public of the organization will desire some benefit. An organization can through sponsorship of events, scholarship; sports etc achieve some objectives which include publicity, marketing, entertainment and social responsibility. Facility visit according to Ugbaja (2014), an organization can organize facility visit for members of the public to its premises for the purpose of seeking their support, understanding and cooperation for a program. This technique is used to enhance the image of the organization.

### **2.1.3 Public Relations Tools**

Public relations practice is one of the ways through which public awareness is created. Kotler and Armstrong, (2006) affirm that public relations can have a strong impact on public awareness at a much lower cost than advertising. Public relations makes use of certain tools to achieve its aim. Public relations could be for profit-based organizations or not-for-profit organizations. This study is limited to not-for profit organizations as the delivery of healthcare to women is driven by the desire to save lives, not profit making. Kotler (2008) outlines two models of public relations used in the non-profit sector: This includes The classic, traditional model, centred on an institutional image, maintaining a certain equilibrium in the relationship between the public and institutions. Also, Awareness (public advocacy), closer to contemporary public relations, serves to initiate social action. Rivero and Theodore (2014) say that the tools used in public relations are press releases, lobbying, product publicity, investor's relations, and development. Josan (2010) adds advocacy as part of the tools. IPR (2012) explains the following as the most commonly used PR tools; The first being attendance at public events. To attract public attention and keep it engaged with particular organisation or an individual, PR specialists take an advantage of every public event and the opportunity to speak publicly. This enables them to directly reach the public attending the event and indirectly, a much larger audience. Press releases also involves Information that is communicated as a part of the regular TV or/and radio programme, newspapers, magazines and other types of mainstream media achieves a much bigger impact than advertisements. This is because most people consider such information more trustworthy and meaningful than paid ads. A press release is, therefore, one of the oldest and most effective PR tools. Sending newsletters in form of relevant information about the organisation and its products/services - directly to the target audience is also a common method to create and maintain a strong relationship with the public. PR specialists use it to share news and general information that may be of interest to the target audience rather than merely promoting products/services. Blogging: To reach the online audience, PR specialists use the digital forms of press releases and newsletters, but they also use a variety of other tools

such as blogging and recently, microblogging. It allows them to create and maintain relationship with the target audience as well as establish a two-way communication. Social media marketing: It is used primarily by the marketing industry. Social media networks, however, are also utilised by a growing number of PR specialists to establish a direct communication with the public, consumers, investors and other target groups. It is important to add here that there may be many other PR tools which specialists use in their daily practice (Josan, 2010).

### **2.1.6 Public Relations and Healthcare Delivery**

Healthcare is a fundamental need of all human beings. As a critical need, healthcare describes health services given to persons for the purposes ensuring a healthy living. The World Health Organization (2004) defines healthcare as services provided to individuals or communities by health service providers for the purpose of promoting, maintaining, monitoring or restoring health. Kehinde and Chukwuemeka (2016) describe healthcare as service to the sick, the mentally and physically incapacitated members of the society who need medical attention and help. Kehinde and Chukwuemeka add that this service is provided by health institutions called hospitals, clinics, medical centres, etc. This study found the description of healthcare by W.H.O most appropriate because it does not focus on only the sick, rather, services aimed at promoting and maintaining healthy living. Public relations could be useful in healthcare for the purposes of promoting healthy living.

Over the years, public relations practice in healthcare has undergone some changes, perhaps, as a result of the changing nature of society. Tomic, Lasic and Tomic (2010) corroborate that the practice of public relations in healthcare has changed along with the significant changes in healthcare. According to them, public relations in health care are not particularly different from public relations in any other industry considering that the overall objective of the public relations is still to "match long-term relationships" and "manage reputation. Nonetheless, public relations in healthcare is considered unique because it concerns human lives. Traynowicz-Hetherington and Parkinson (2001) affirm that healthcare is a unique industry because of things at its disposal such as life, death and recovery. Cutlip, Center and Broom (2003) aver that health institutions are expected to more and better respond to the desires and needs of their market.

The submission of, Cutlip et al implies that institutions are to treat their publics in the same manner that other organizations do. One of the ways to do this is through public relations. Gbadeyan (2010) examined how marketing and public relations activities have contributed to the realization of the organizational objectives of Not-for-Profit health care in Nigeria. The study was carried out in ten out of the sixteen Local Government Areas of Kwara State of Nigeria. The data for the research was obtained through pro-forma type questionnaire administered to both health care marketing staff and patients from twenty out of the one hundred and thirty-five government hospitals in the state. The results of the study indicated that there exists a significant relationship between the income received from patient and marketing budget for the Health Care Organisation. The Model fit for the effect of education, age and work experience on salary was significant at 99 percent while a similar result was obtained for the effect of marketing activities on Hospital Services at 99 percent significant level. Therefore, public relations tools could be helpful to healthcare services.

### **2.1.7 The General Perception about Doctors' and Patients' Relationship in Health Institutions in Nigeria**

In addition, patients have become better informed and more accountable consumers of healthcare services and want to become more active participants in decisions regarding the treatment process (Akinci et al., 2004). This increased desire for consumer choice has forced hospital managers to look at service availability in a different way; thereby opening the door for more customer-oriented recruitment strategy. Increased emphasis in the area of public relations can help to bring consumer-friendly services to the forefront increasing agency marketability and consumer choice. The focus of marketing department is now to attract more pool of patients by identifying the desires and need of the people (Cutlip, 2003). The PRs has given the responsibility to promote a positive image and transfer of news, dealing with criticism and training of internal public for teamwork the reason behind the patronage of patients is quality of medical services offered by the hospitals along with helpful, pleasant and good attitude and behaviour of staff (medical and non-medical) and comfortable environment of the hospital. The combination of these factors results in the satisfaction of the patients and builds a positive image and trust within them which will bring them back to the hospital in future whenever there is a need of medical services and hence succeeding in making brand loyal customers. Not only this, brand loyal and satisfied customers will bring more business to the organization through positive word of mouth publicity which is proven the most trustable form of promotions (Sharma & Sharma, 2015).

For example, management perception of customers' expectations could be at variance because management may not necessarily know what the customers desire from the organization. The quality of health care service delivery in Nigeria is far below what is obtainable in the Western world, where there are often, the state-of-the-art medical technologies and innovative medications (Abiodun, 2010). In Nigeria, there is a paucity of training for medical staff as well as lack of renowned and well-equipped medical outfits (Fatunde, 2009). Patients often complain of long waiting time, majorly due to a significant disparity between patient and medical staff ratio (too many patients for too few medical staff). Communication between patients and medical staff is often poor, and sometimes the experiences between patients and medical staff are so poor that a switch from one hospital to another or from one physician to another becomes necessary with a few choices available for the patients (Adepoju, 2018). These switches can cause serious disruptions in the continuity of care with a negative impact on the outcome of care. The patients are often less informed and less knowledgeable about what constitutes quality service from patients' perspective.

Besides, the patient mix has also changed tremendously. Hospitals often encounter widely traveled patients who are increasingly more aware of what good health care service entails. These patients continuously demand better service quality. To remain competitive and sustainable, the provision of high service quality by health service providers becomes critical. Although many researchers have studied service quality in many industries including the health sector and made their contributions available in the literature, there is a scarcity of information on service quality in health sector from countries

in sub-Saharan Africa. This is particularly important because of a few and recent reports of poor service quality in Nigeria (Aregbeshola, 2019) with a potential threat to a hitherto exiting high patient satisfaction rating. A negative patient satisfaction rating could create a negative image for the hospital (Mahmoud & Reisel, 2014).

### **2.1.8 Historical Background of Federal Medical Centre, Owerri**

The Federal Medical Centre, Owerri, is a tertiary health institution structured mainly into two broad arms of clinical and non-clinical division. Its responsibility is primarily the provision of advanced surgical and medical care to patients, as well as part grade waste and internship training programmes. The evolution and development of the institution began in the year 1903 by the colonial masters. At the period the hospital has three wards. Maternity, male and female wards which also admitted children, other available facilities at the hospital in 1903 include a theater, and a general out-patient department. Then the medical staffs of the hospital were one doctor general practitioner and few medical personnel. The hospital known as shell daily hospital was handed over to the government of Eastern Nigeria in late fifties and renamed Okpara Medical Personnel home after the premiership of D.M.I. Okpara following the handover, further development took place. These include provision of gynecological/obstetric ward while the old shell-daily hospital complex became the anti-natal clinic and administration block.

In 1976, the hospital was transformed into a divisional hospital and later turned into a general hospital following the creation of Imo State. During this period, a modern outpatient department with six new wards of pharmacy department, infant welfare clinic, a matrimony and chest unit. This further expansion brought the bed complement of the general hospital to four hundred and one beds in eleven wards. Then on the 1st January, 1995, the status and functions of the general hospital Owerri changed with its takeover by the federal government as a special hospital and renamed it the Federal Medical Centre, Owerri. The responsibility of the centre includes the provision of advanced and specialized medical and surgical services to patients.

It also provides for research and training, diagnoses disease, treat and rehabilitates the patients. They recognize the patients need for independence privacy and awareness in intelligent application of the diagnostic and preventive measure to individual patient needs.

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## **3. Theoretical Framework**

Theoretical framework in this section seeks to link the work to an existing theory. There are so many theories which have been developed by scholars in the field of Mass communication. The researchers will hinge this work on transfer process model.

Of utmost significance to this research work is the public relations transfer process model propounded by Frank Jefkins in 1988. According to Nweke (2001, p. 53), the model is an antidote against some negative developments in organisations. Jefkins (1988) cited in Nweke (2001) expatiates that when the negative situation is converted into positive achievements through knowledge, the result predictably, is the primary objective of public relations practice- understanding. The model explains how practitioners can use and apply public relations tools and strategies towards changing hostility among an organisation's target publics to sympathy so as to be in a better position to convert prejudice into acceptance, develop interest when there is apathy and then, be able to communicate effectively to achieve knowledge where there is ignorance.

Jefkins expatiates that when the negative situation is converted into positive achievements through knowledge, the result predictably, is the primary objective of public relations practice-understanding. The model explains how practitioners can use and apply public relations tools and strategies towards changing hostility among an organisation's target publics to sympathy so as to be in a better position to convert prejudice into acceptance, develop interest when there is apathy and then, be able to communicate effectively to achieve knowledge where there is ignorance. From the foregoing, it means that organisations can use Jefkins' public relations transfer process model to win the goodwill of the public so as to reduce crisis. Through communication, the public relations practitioner can convert the four negative attitudes of the public into four positive attitudes- ignorance to knowledge, hostility to sympathy, prejudice to acceptance, apathy to interest (Oluwasola, 2016).

The transfer process model explains that public relations strategies can be used to change hostility to sympathy prejudice to acceptance, apathy to interest and ignorance to knowledge, crises/war to peace/harmony. Public relations as a philosophy of management thrives on mutual understanding and openness i.e. being understood by other people and understanding people, informing other people but being informed about their wishes and attitudes. "The effect of public relations could be felt in all spheres of human endeavours, as it involves efforts to convince, win as retain support for ideas, products and services (Ngwoke, 2010).

From the foregoing, it means that FMC Owerri can use Jefkins' public relations transfer process model to win the goodwill of the public so as to reduce crisis. This is because, through communication, the public relations practitioner in health institutions can Convert the four negative attitudes of the public into four positive attitudes - ignorance to knowledge, hostility to sympathy, prejudice to acceptance, apathy to interest the transfer process model was considered to be relevant to this study in that, perfection is something humanity cannot attain but, always strive towards. Based on this premise, organisations are bound to experience hostility, apathy and prejudice from members of their publics, and once an organisation experiences any of these, the transfer process model comes in handy.

#### 4. Empirical Review

Hilmi, H. and Emenyeonu, O.C. (2014) carried out research on the role of public relations departments in health information dissemination in hospitals: Toward a successful health care delivery system in Oman. *International Journal of Arts and Commerce*,3(9)40-55. This study takes a holistic look at the role played by PR professionals in the dissemination of health information in hospitals in Oman. The study finds that the nascent PR practice in Oman is yet to assume the standard seen elsewhere in the developed world. The study also reveals that use of information technologies in the dissemination of health information is not in pace with the rapid development in the ICT sector. The study concludes that rather than being reduced to a customer service or front desk department, the hospital PRDs should actively be involved in well formulated and standard public relations functions that will include publicizing and increasing visibility for hospitals and their engagements

Also, Gbadeyan, R.A (2010) carried out research on Customer relationship management and hospital service equity in Nigeria. *African Research Review, An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal, Ethiopia*, 4 (2), 168-184. The Objective of this study therefore is to examine how Customer Relationship Management can be employed to bring about improve health service quality in Nigeria. The data for the study was collected through questionnaire instrument administered to 200 health workers at the University of Ilorin Teaching Hospital Ilorin, Nigeria. Thus the study adopted a case study approach method. Findings reveal that the mean age was not significantly different from the hypothesized value, Customer Relationship Management (C.R.M.) has significant effects on the quality of Hospital Services in Nigeria(  $\chi=0.000$ .  $d.f=2$  and  $P \leq 0.05$ ) and three factors namely: Interactive Management, Personalisation, and Relations with Patients are relevant factors in the implementation of Customer Relationship Management in Nigerian Hospitals. The study recommends preplanning and understanding expectation of Stakeholders for CRM successful implementation.

Again, Alteneiyg E.S.A.(2021) carried out research on Public Relations in health institutions. A thesis from the University of Sharjah. The study focuses on the role of PR in health institutions, communication strategies of PR, communication campaigns and media used by PR departments in health institutions. This was studied through descriptive method using a survey that was distributed to a sample from hospitals' clients to explore their view, opinions, and evaluation about the role of PR in health. Results showed that communication activities in health fields help in raising the health awareness. It also emphasized the importance of using integrated media to convey the health information and the desired health behaviours.

Lastly, Nnabuko, J.O & Onyiaji, J. (2021), carried out a research on Application of public relations in enhancing healthcare delivery to women of reproductive age in Southeast Nigeria. *World Journal of Innovative Research (WJIR)*10(2) 09-15. This study investigated the extent and frequency of use of PR tools for enhancing healthcare delivery to women of reproductive age from selected states in South-East Nigeria. The survey research design was adopted for the study while data was collected from 201 PR experts and 384 women of reproductive age (18-49 years). Mean, and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the t-test was used to test the hypotheses raised. The findings included that most of the PR tools, such as attendance at public events, blogging, social media marketing, advocacy and word of mouth advertising were used to a low extent. Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommended, among others, that health workers should make use of PR tools to a large extent in delivering healthcare services to women of reproductive age.

#### 5. Research Methodology

Out of the 371 copies of the distributed questionnaire, 12 were invalid since 5 were not returned, 5 were partially completed and 2 had mutilated answers. It meant that 6.5% of the produced copies of the questionnaire were invalid for this study. It was the used 96.8% or 359 valid copies that presented the 100% used in this study. The return rate is higher than the mortality rate of 3.2% which does not affect the study, because it is in significant compared to the returned rate of 96.8%. Thus, the copies were considered adequate enough to represent the population.

#### 6. Data Analysis

**Table 1:** Age Range of the Respondents

Age	Frequency	Valid Percent
18-30	108	28.2
31-40	180	30.1
41 and above	78	21.7
Total	359	100

From table the above, the analysis showed that a good number of the respondents were in their active and productive age as to take a stand on public relations strategies adopted by FMC, Owerri in their service delivery. It is clear that people within this age bracket of 31-40, and 18-30 age range clearly understand what public relations strategies as employees entails in order to hold a valid opinion on the issue under study.

**Table 2:** Gender

Sex	Frequency	Valid Percent
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Male	139	38.7
Female	220	61.3
Total	359	100

The table above indicates that female respondents dominated the sample study at 220 respondents amounting to 61.7%, while the male respondents were 139 representing 38.7%. This means that employees in the hospital are mostly females.

**Table 3:** Marital Status

Status	Frequency	Valid Percent
Single	111	30.9
Married	234	65.2
Divorced	14	3.9
Total	359	100

From the table above, it means that most of the respondents in the valid sample were married at 65.2%. This means that most employees at the at the hospitals are married.

**Table 4:** Academic Qualifications

Qualifications	Frequency	Valid Percent
SSCE/NECO	68	17.9
OND/NCE	84	22.1
B.Sc./HND	151	39.7
M.Sc./Ph.D	77	20.3
Total	359	100

It is clearly evident that all the respondents sampled in this study all held certificate above primary six. The implication is that the respondents are made up of educated men and women who are health personnel and knowledgeable about public relations strategies.

**Table 5:** Respondents Year of Experience

Year of Experience	Frequency	Valid Percent
Below 4 Years	85	22.4
5-10 Years	135	34.7
11-15 Years	77	20.7
16-20 Years	51	13.4
20 and Above	35	9.2
Total	359	100

The table above reveals that 295 representing 77.6% of the respondents had good working experience as their number of years ranged from 5-10 years to 20 years and above. It means that majority had been in the various ministries selected for this and therefore, were well qualified to discuss issues patterning to newspaper coverage of hate speech bill. This is because as technocrats and administrators that could possibly raised their views on issues like this that probably affect the country.

**Table 6:** The Public Relations Strategies Adopted by FMC Owerri in her service.

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decisions
1	Informing the staff about the institutional objectives and policies	170	158	15	18	3.32	Agreed

2	Providing flow of knowledge and information from top management to staff	192	144	15	10	3.43	Agreed
3	Establish an information desk to answer the questions of patients and their companions	173	145	14	29	3.27	Agreed
4	Providing complaint boxes and a phone line via which patients and companions experiencing problems can express their problems	173	163	15	10	3.38	Agreed
5	Providing the transfer of information, demands, wishes and complaints of staff to top management by means of formal or informal communication channels	165	169	19	10	3.34	Agreed
6	Organizing seminars, panels, workshops and conferences to encourage staff to improve their professional knowledge	176	155	18	12	3.37	Agreed
7	Organizing in-service training seminars for personnel on the subjects of communication with patients and patient companions	195	135	19	12	3.42	Agreed
8	Preparing posters, brochures etc for informing and enlightening the patients and companions referring to the hospital	179	160	9	13	3.39	Agreed
	Grand Total					3.36	Agreed

Table 6 indicated that items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 respectively, recorded grand mean scores of 3.36 which is greater than the average mean of 2.5. This implies that the respondents agreed that informing the staff about the institutional objectives and policies, providing flow of knowledge and information from top management to staff, establish an information desk to answer the questions of the patients and their companions, providing complaint boxes and having a phone line via which patients and companions experiencing problems can express their problems, providing the transfer of information, demands, wishes and complaints of staff to top management by means of formal or informal communication channels, organizing in-service training seminars for personnel on the subjects of communication with patients and patient companions, and Preparing posters, brochures and etc. for informing and enlightening the patients and companions referring to the hospital.

**Table 7:** The extent to which FMC Owerri embraced public relations strategies in improving their service delivery

S/N	Item Statement	VGE	GE	LE	VLE	Mean	Decisions
9	Informing the staff about the institutional objectives and policies	48	149	48	26	3.10	Agreed
10	Providing flow of knowledge and information from top management to staff	180	96	40	45	3.13	Agreed
11	Establish an information desk to answer the questions of patients and their companions	174	112	29	46	3.14	Agreed
12	Providing complaint boxes and a phone line via which patients and companions experiencing problems can express their problems	169	107	60	25	3.16	Agreed
13	Providing the transfer of information, demands, wishes and complaints of staff to top management by means of formal or informal communication channels	123	149	39	50	2.95	Agreed
14	Organizing seminars, panels, workshops and conferences to encourage staff to improve their professional knowledge	71	85	135	70	2.43	Disagreed



15	Organizing in-service training seminars for personnel on the subjects of communication with patients and patient accompaniers	48	98	75	140	2.14	Disagreed
16	Preparing posters, brochures etc for informing and enlightening the patients and accompaniers referring to the hospital	79	90	120	72	2.48	Disagreed
	Grand Total					2.81	Agreed

Table 6 shows the mean response of the respondents on the extent to which FMC Owerri embraced public relations strategies in improving their service delivery. This indicated that majority of the respondents were in agreement with the statements in the items 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 respectively with a grand mean scores of 2.81 which is greater than criterion mean of 2.5. This confirmed that the extent to which FMC embraced public relations strategies in their service delivery is to a great extent. However, most of the respondents believed that the extent to which FMC embraced public relations strategies is to a low extent as indicated with average mean score of 2.43, 2.14 and 2.46 as shown in items 14, 15 and 16 respectively. This is because they believed that extent to which they organize seminars, panels, workshops and conferences in order to encourage staff to improve their professional knowledge, in-service training seminars for personnel on the subjects of communication with patients and patient accompaniers, and preparing posters, brochures and etc. for informing and enlightening the patients and accompaniers of referrals to the hospitals.

**Table 8:** The employees perception of FMC, Owerri public relations policies of the institution

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decisions
17	Doctors and nurses are friendly to the patients	145	141	40	35	3.09	Agreed
18	The health care delivery is encouraging	130	108	70	53	2.87	Agreed
19	Most of the patients are well attended to	132	139	40	50	2.97	Agreed
20	There is prompt response to patient's complaints	95	102	90	74	2.60	Agreed
21	Satisfactory services to our patients	143	139	49	30	3.09	Agreed
	Grand Total					2.92	Agreed

The table above with (Average Weight Mean=2.92) indicates that a good number of the respondents believed that the public relations strategies of FMC, Owerri and , Orlu is positive. This is because they respondents agreed that nurses and doctors are friendly to the patients, the healthcare delivery is encouraging, most of the patients are well attended to, There is prompt response to patients complaints, and satisfactory services to their patients. This implies that FMC have good and favourable perception among their employees based on their level of adoption of public relations strategies in improving their services.

**Table 9:** Challenges facing effective utilization of public relations strategies in FMC Owerri

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decisions
22	Incessant strike	179	133	29	20	3.30	Agreed
23	Corruption	151	171	12	20	3.29	Agreed
24	Unqualified public relations executive	169	157	20	15	3.32	Agreed
25	Inadequate staff	109	139	64	49	2.85	Agreed
26	Lack of staff incentives	146	162	30	23	3.19	Agreed
27	Work overload	170	119	43	29	3.19	Agreed
	Grand total					3.17	Agreed

From table above, it is clear that a good number of the respondents believe that the incessant strike, corruption, unqualified public relations executive, inadequate staff, lack of staff incentives and work overload were the challenges facing effective utilisation of public relations strategies in FMC Owerri (Average weighted mean = 3.17). The implication is that the employees of FMC are worried over the fact the colossal strike experienced in the government owned hospitals, corruption by politicians and management officials, which has resulted into posting of staff or people who are not qualified and are not trained public relations officers into as public relations executives, shortage of manpower to attend to the influx of patients that needs their services, lack of incentives which reduces the morale of the staff in the discharge of their duties as well as excess work overload. All these issues among others poses a serious threat to all the public relations strategies.

## 7. Conclusion

Based on the research carried out on employee perception of public relations practice in health institutions in Imo State. A study of federal medical centre Owerri. We found out that FMC Owerri employed public relations strategies in their service delivery. This is aimed at improving the quality of their services to the patients. It implies that the management health institutions in Nigeria use a good number of public relations strategies in order to render satisfactory services to the patients. The employees perceived the FMC Owerri public relations strategies as positive, as these strategies in essence, go along way in improving their service delivery. Although, the extent to which these public relations strategies are utilised is not satisfactory to the employees. This is because both management and staff have not fully adopted the public relations strategies employed in their service delivery. Notwithstanding, the successes recorded in the course of adopting public relations strategies, incessant strike, corruption, unqualified public relations executive, inadequate staff, lack of staff incentives and work overload have continuously remained a serious challenge facing effective utilisation of public relations strategies in FMC Owerri

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made: Health Institutions Nigerian as a matter of necessity should adopt public relations as a key management function in improving their services. Also, there is need for health institutions just like every other establishment to fully embrace public relation strategies in other to retain the patronage of their patient. Public relations strategies should be seen as a better way of bettering their image as well as improving their service delivery to sustain the employee perception towards health institutions. there is need for them to organize seminars workshop and enlighten in other to conscientize the staff or the employees on public relations tips. Government and other stakeholders and other health stakeholders should endeavour to improve on staff welfare and condition of service as this will inspire them to put in their best. They should endeavour to reduce the level of strike and work overload as this would help in improving their services.

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